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ABSTRACT

In May 1990, the Ministry of National Education announced its Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) for education in South Africa to seek short- and medium-term managerial solutions for some of the nation's most pressing educational needs. This ERS advances five major policy recommendations for a future education model: (1) race should not be a factor and equal opportunity should be assured; (2) national unity should be promoted while respect for diversity is ensured; (3) a balance between national regulation and local autonomy should be maintained; (4) the future constitution of South Africa should allow for a decentralized education system unified at the national level, with accountability at both levels; and (5) responsibility for the new model should be shared by national and local government, teacher organizations, parent groups, and other interested parties. In the specific area of early childhood educare, the ERS recommends that distance education should be encouraged through the funding of suitable preschool television and radio programs and the development of instructional video programs to train adults to assist in the early childhood learning environment. It also recommends a preprimary bridge program for children not yet ready for the first year of schooling. Plans to provide 7, 8, or even 9 years of compulsory, state-financed education for all South Africans are considered economically unrealistic, however, considering present governmental allocations to education. (MDM)

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THE GOVERNMENT'S EDUCATIONAL RENEWAL STRATEGY (ERS) AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCARE

Ignoring the needs of 7 million children

BY

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1. INTRODUCTION

In May 1990 the Minister of National Education announced the development of an Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) for education in South Africa. This strategy was developed in conjunction with the Ministers of Departments of State responsible for education and was carried out under the auspices of the Committee of Heads of Education Departments. The intention was to seek short and medium term managerial solutions for some of the most pressing problems in education.

It was acknowledged that the present education model enjoyed little support amongst the majority of South Africans and it was expected that solutions would be found through which the education system would be acceptable to the majority of South Africans and would "enjoy their understanding and support".

A fundamental revision of the education system, to prevent the country from finding itself in a never-ending spiral of poverty, frustration and unfulfilled expectations, was necessary.

2. THE EDUCATION MODEL

In evaluating the present education model the following eleven principles for education, amongst others, are used in the ERS as a norm for the provision of education:

* Equal education opportunities should be available to all learners.
* A balance of commonality and diversity in education
* Freedom of choice for individual learners
* Curriculum should be relevant and take cognisance of the personpower needs of the country
* A positive linkage between formal and non-formal education
* An acceptable relationship between State and parental responsibilities for formal education
* State and private sector responsibility for non-formal education
* State support for private education must be adequate
* A healthy balance between administrative centralisation and decentralisation
* Acknowledgement of the professional status of educators is essential
* The provision of education should be based on continuing research.

In general it was found that the present education system does not measure up to this set of principles because an unacceptable and educationally irrelevant basis for accommodating diversity, namely race has been used in providing education.

Major stand points of the ERS

The five major recommendations of the ERS are that:

(i) Race should not feature in structuring the provision of education in a future education system for south africa and justice in educational opportunities must be ensured.

(ii) A new education system should promote and express national unity. Bearing in mind the non-racial basis of a new education system, provision will have to be made for the accommodation of diversity based on internationally recognised and educationally relevant basic human rights such as mother tongue education, freedom of religion and the practice and transmission of an own culture. Freedom of association must consequently form a cornerstone of the new education system.

(iii) A new education system should provide for the existence of a central education authority and regionally-based departments of education. The central authority should bear responsibility for policy on norms and standards in respect of various crucial matters in education, and should be responsible for categories of institutions of a more national character which enjoy a very large degree of autonomy. It is further felt that political responsibility and accountability should be established at the different levels.

Other functions relating to education can fall under the jurisdiction of the regional departments: provided that the principle of maximum functionally justifiable devolution of decision-making power to the community or individual institution is upheld throughout.

In keeping with this last-mentioned principle, various categories of public schools should be established and equitably funded. Differences between these schools relate to differences in levels of management autonomy. Such an approach will also provide for the accommodation of natural educationally relevant diversity where such a need exists. Furthermore, it is conceivable that schools wishing to cooperate in the provision of education by, for example, sharing resources could organise themselves into some kind of regional, developmental or value-centred organisational grouping.

(iv) The South African education system should provide for the sharing of responsibilities regarding education between political/educational authorities at different levels, parent communities, the organised teaching profession and other stakeholders to ensure effective education for all learners.

3. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCARE

Two sections of the ERS relate to early childhood educare.

a) Distance education and training

Distance education is seen as an alternative, and possibly cheaper, way of providing education for the masses in the short term. Various prospects target groups are identified. Children of pre-school age is one group for whom distance education in a supplementary and supporting mode could yield appreciable results. A substantial investment in this regard is universally recognised as leading to enhanced school readiness, especially in disadvantaged groups, thereby reducing drop-out rates in later school years. The programmes envisaged here are not formal pre-primary education programmes but non-formal education programmes aimed at the pre-school group aged three to six years old, where parents and non-teachers who have received some training can guide the children. TV programmes such as the USA's "Reading Rainbow", "Mister Rogers", "Neighbourhood" and "Sesame Street" are examples well worth emulating.

The report feels that the electronic media are to a considerable extent already involved in the provision of programmes of this nature.

Table 1 below indicates the recommended appropriate distance teaching medium for preschool children.

TABLE 1: **GRID COMBINING TARGET GROUP AND APPLICABLE DISTANCE TEACHING/TRAINING MEDIUM**

APPLICABLE DISTANCE TEACHING/TRAINING MEDIUM

TARGET GROUP	ALTERNATIVE	SUPPLEMENTARY	SUPPORTIVE
Preschool Children	P A V Com	A V	A V
	A V	A V	A V
	A	A	A

Medium P - Printed text
A - Audio cassette/radio
V - Video cassette/TV
Com - Computer-aided

The ERS recommends that:

(i) Organised trade and industry, and especially those employers who provide preschool facilities for their employees, together with national preschool associations and other interested parties, should take the lead in extending and using the initiatives already taken by the electronic media. These bodies should also take the lead in developing suitable programmes in module form for the training of adults, who are not necessarily teachers, to guide children in the preschool non-formal learning situation.

(b) Pre-primary education

The ERS acknowledges that although some education departments are involved in providing pre-primary education most departments have had to scale down their activities in this sphere owing to severe budget restrictions. Furthermore, no general policy for this type of education exists at present, each education department determining its own approach to pre-primary education. This approach is based on a decision taken by the Education Ministers in 1987 that general policy for ordinary school education should first be determined in its various facets, after which policy for pre-primary education could be considered.

The Education Ministers also decided in 1987 that learners in their first school year who showed that they were not yet sufficiently ready for school should enjoy the benefit of a special bridging programme during that year. Depending on their progress in the bridging programme, they could rejoin the ordinary school programme during their first or second school year or repeat their first school year. The DET is already involved to a considerable extent in the presentation of such programmes. (For a critique of this programme see Taylor N (1992) The Bridging Period Programme: An early assessment. NEPI working paper.)

The major part of pre-primary education is at present conducted outside of the formal education system, usually with some links to the formal education sector such as registration or receiving small subsidies . The value of pre-primary education in improving performance in the ordinary school is universally acknowledged. This is the case particularly with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds who frequently are not ready for school when reaching school-going age. The result is usually manifested in high drop-out rates during later school years.

Financial analyses are made in which different models of general compulsory education are considered. One of these includes one-year compulsory pre-primary education plus seven years of compulsory primary education. From that scenario the ERS suggests that

" ...it is clear that the State is not in a position to make one year pre-primary education compulsory and accept 100% responsibility therefor. In addition the learner:educator ratios that have been accepted for this scenario are such that meaningful pre-primary education with a view to school preparedness would not be possible. A more favourable learner:educator ratio for the pre-primary phase only is totally impossible because it would only put this model further out of reach than it already is. To achieve any degree of uniformity in this sector it will be necessary for Government to determine policy on the matter that can ensure certain standards of education".

The ERS recommends that:

The committee of heads of education departments (ched) will have to appoint a task team representative of the chief stakeholders in pre-primary education to develop a nationally acceptable approach to pre-primary education. Existing pre-primary education practice, the relationship between pre-primary and junior primary education and the role of pre-primary education or a bridging period in preparation for school should, inter alia, be investigated.

4. THE ERS CONCLUDING REMARKS

The ERS concludes by stating that the standpoints expressed cover a large number of the most pressing issues in education in south africa today. All these standpoints stress short and medium term management solutions to the issues concerned. From the discussion of the different standpoints it should, however, be clear that mere organisational changes or simply obtaining more funding for education will not in themselves solve the problems touched on in the report. Structural changes, such as those outlined are essential if we wish to establish a more cost-effective education system in which the ideal of equal educational opportunities for all learners is given a tangible form in our country.

If the renewal of education as proposed in the ERS document is consistently pursued, it is suggested by the government that the following can be attained:

a. Education up to the highest level will be available to everyone who has the ability to profit by it, within a single non-racial education system and within the framework of national education policy, given the national resources available for education and the resources available to the individual for study.

b. Education will contribute substantially to the establishment of a non-racial, democratic society which will promote national unity and will at the same time provide for diversity with regard to religion, language and culture.

c. Equal education opportunities will be promoted on a national basis.

d. Backlogs in education will be addressed effectively by, for example, the linking of the formal education system to the vocational training system; the extension of the distance education system to include school education and teacher education; the extended role of visualised for the technical colleges; the establishment of community colleges; a new curriculum for pre-tertiary education; and the scaling-down of building norms for classroom space. Existing disparities will largely be eliminated within 10 years and in this way equal education opportunities will be created for all learners.

e. Education will produce learners at the end of their period of learning who are capable of participating constructively in the broad spheres of community life especially the economic sphere.

f. Opportunities will be created for the community to participate in the ongoing process of the renewal of education. The involvement of parents in education will become established and will be continually stimulated.

g. Education will contribute towards establishing a learning culture and the desire to obtain and apply knowledge in the country.

h. Education will provide education programmes that are relevant to the learner as well as to the employer at a later stage. It will also provide adequately for the personpower needs of the country and so contribute towards economic growth.

i. The basis for the provision of education will be broadened by the introduction of compulsory education, while maintaining acceptable standards. The introduction of general compulsory schooling will effectively contribute towards raising the literacy level of the country.

j. The use of technology, which plays an important role in the provision of education, will be maximised and access to participating in its use will be brought about on a broad basis.

k. Vocational education and training will provide an opportunity for a significant number of learners to develop skills that may be offered on the labour market.

l. The financing of education for at least the next fifteen years will be undertaken by means of an effective though adaptable financing plan for education.

The report recommends that in the development of a functioning plan for education, existing backlogs in the provision of education for certain communities must naturally be taken into account.

In the development of scenarios a distinction was further made between a number job alternatives in regard to compulsory education provided entirely or largely by the state:

a) no general compulsory education (present position).

b) Seven years of compulsory education from grade 1 up to and including grade 7 that will be phased in from 1993 over a period of seven years. In spite of the compulsory nature of this education, a drop-out rate of 1% for the different grades in the primary school phases is assumed for the DET and the SGT'S. This is to make allowance for the fact that opportunities for special school education and other forms of remedial education for the DET and the SGTS will not yet be provided to a sufficient degree by the year 2003.

c) Eight years of compulsory education, consisting of one year of pre-school education (grade 0) plus a further seven years of compulsory education, as described above, that will commence in 1993. On the basis of the investment in pre-primary education, it was assumed that the drop-out rate of the DET and the SGTS from grade 1 to 7 could be left out in this case.

d) Nine years of compulsory education from grade 1 to grade 7 (primary school phase) plus grades 8 and 9 (junior secondary school phase) that will be phased in from 1993 over a period of nine years. In spite of the compulsory nature of this education a drop-out rate of 1% for the grade 1 up to grade 7 is assumed.

The motivation for considering compulsory State-provided education is that no country can afford not to give all its future citizens at least a thorough basic education in order to prepare them for meaningful participation in an increasingly complex society.

The only option involving preschool children proposes state responsibility in respect of financing the relevant phases of education expressed as a % in each case.

Eight years of compulsory schooling:

Grade 0 and grades 1 to 7	100%
Grades 8 and 9	75%
Grades 10 to 12	50%

Scenario 1 : seven years of general compulsory education (from grade 1 to grade 7)

In addition to the other assumptions, it is assumed that the State's financing responsibility for these scenarios is as follows:

Primary school phase (Grade 1 to 7)	100%
Junior secondary school phase (Grades 8 to 9)	
Senior secondary school phase (Grade 10 to 12)	

The leaner educator ratio is 35:1 (primary school phase) and 32:1 (secondary school phase), and the pass, repeat and drop-out rates for school education are as in par 24.9 (b) (i). For this scenario the following expenditure distribution (including the TBVC states) is obtained of rand value of 1992.

Year	1992	1993	1994	1995	1998	2003	2008
Expenditure	22553	22770	23920	24649	27907	33964	36178

The graph if the State expenditure on education for this scenario indicates clearly that it is not affordable - not even with a real annual economic growth rate of 3%. This means that, apart from the structural adaptions to education presented in par 24.9 and on which this scenario is based, further adaption would be necessary to make this scenario in any way affordable. If State expenditure on education could be brought to 7% of the GDP, this scenario could well be affordable at an initial economic growth rate of 2% per annum, but this would have to increase to 3% per annum from about 1997.

Scenario 2: Eight years of general compulsory education (Grade 0 and Grades 1 to 7)

In addition to the other assumptions, the State's financing responsibility for this scenario is as follows:

Pre-school phase (Grade 0) 100%
Primary school phase (Grades 1 to 7): 75%
Junior secondary school phase (Grades 8 to 9):
Senior secondary school phase (Grades 10 to 12):

The leaner:educator ratio is as before: 35:1 (pre-school and primary school phase) and 32:1 (secondary school phase), and the pass, repeat and drop-out rates for school education are as at par 24.9 (b) (i). For this scenario the following expenditure distribution (including the TBVC states) is obtained in millions of rands at the rand value of 1992.

Year:	1992	1993	1994	1995	1998	2003	2008
Expenditure:	22546	26418	26485	25659	29147	37895	40488

From the graph below it is clear that this scenario amounts to wishful thinking. There is absolutely no way in which the State can finance pre-school education on the basis proposed in this scenario. Even if the State could allot as much as 8% of the GDP to education - which is out of the question - the real economic growth rate would have to be about 2,5% per annum as from the year 2000 to make this scenario affordable.

In addition, this scenario is based on a learner:educator ratio of 31:1 in the pre-school year, which amounts to a leaner:teacher ratio of about 38:1. Such a ratio is quite out of the question in the pre-school year if the aim of such a (pre-school) year is to reach school-readiness. A more favourable learner:educator ratio for the pre-school year only would, however, make the scenario even more unaffordable.

Another alternative would be that the State should not accept full financial responsibility for the pre-school year. This would most probably mean,however, that this year could not be regarded as part of the compulsory education period, which in turn means that great numbers of the learners for whom the school-readiness programmes are essential because they are handicapped by their unfavourable milieu, could still not be compelled to undergo this type of education.

What the ERS does is to ignore the needs of 7 million pre-school children.